

## A Pastor's Perspective — On Reading the Bible

“Overcoming Excuses to Bible Reading” by Timothy D. Sprankle

I just had the conversation again. A young adult from my congregation confessed that he did not read his Bible. “I know I should,” he said. “I’ve been a Christian for thirteen years. But I just don’t read it.”

I began to probe, searching for reasons. He cited several, tried and true excuses I’ve heard others voice. Excuses I am prone to, as well. Reasons *not* to read the Bible abound for the average Christ-follower.

**No Understanding:** The Bible is an ancient document comprising many authors, genres, and languages. Its authors use difficult cultural symbols, commands, idioms, and expressions. If scholars of diverse specialties (archeology, theology, linguistics, hermeneutics, etc.) disagree over a given text’s meaning, how can the average reader expect to interpret the text?

**No Time:** Life is busy. To read the Bible with any fluency requires time the average Christ-follower does not have between work, family, hobbies, and social gatherings. Her time in the Word includes occasional sermons and devotional excerpts. She cannot carve out the time to study Hosea or read the Bible in a Year.

**No Passion:** If the Bible feels too familiar or foreign, it will diminish the Christ-follower’s will to read. Truth be told: sometimes the Psalms seem repetitive and gospels predictable to a lifetime reader. How many times must we revisit Joshua’s land apportionment before getting the gist? Such thinking easily erodes one’s passion to read and re-read.

**No Plan:** People often do not know where to start in their Bible reading. Genesis? John? And then what? Long-range reading plans, whether it’s a chronological consumption of the Bible, or steady march through Paul’s letters, tend to elude us, resulting in many fits and starts.

**No Effect:** Sadly, for too many readers the “living and active” word feels sterile. They do not hear the voice of God or see the fruit of transformation. The Scriptures do not dig deep roots in our minds, but fade to the background when life’s urgency rises.

Unless we challenge these excuses, they will continue to hold sway. Fortunately, we may overcome them with a few proven strategies.

**Read More:** Literacy increases as you spend time with an unfamiliar dialect. I’m currently reading Dickens’s classic, *Oliver Twist*, but the first forty pages demanded full attention. More time in the text tuned my ear to the author’s style. More time in the Bible tunes our ear to God’s voice.

**Read with a Plan:** Good plans overcome the tendency to stop and start (or never start at all). They also break down Bible reading into manageable sizes (2-3 chapters) to help with time management. They may coordinate with a sermon series or Liturgical calendar.

**Read with Others:** When we read the Bible together, accountability and understanding increase. We share questions, insights, and applications we might not find on our own. Bonhoeffer makes a powerful case for daily reading with others in *Life Together*.

**Read Prayerfully:** When we approach reading as a conversation with the living God (not simply an ancient text), we take a posture of listening. We ask God to speak. We share with Him our questions or concerns. As we conclude our reading, we meditate on key ideas, asking God to transform us.

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